

Togelherness



created by Kenneth and
Elizabeth Piotrowski



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Togetherness



Cogelherness

created by
Kenneth and
Elizabeth
Piotrowski

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illustrated by
John Kollok.



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This book is dedicated to our
wonderful sons
Anthony and Kenneth Piotrowski

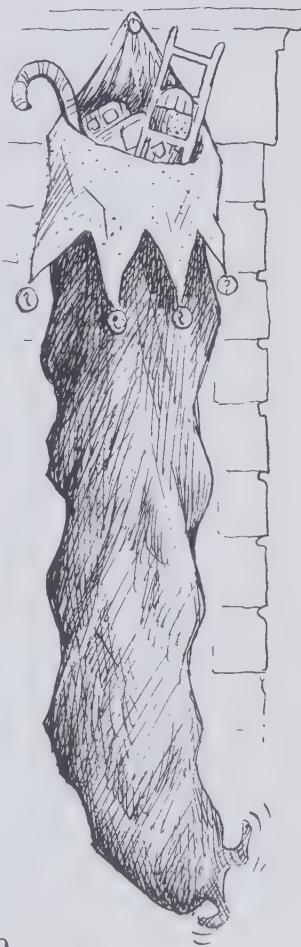




Dcourse everyone knows there is a Santa Claus. That is a proven fact. There is evidence everywhere. Dusty footprints by a fireplace in Waterbury, Connecticut; a half eaten oatmeal cookie and empty milk glass under the tree in Dallas, Texas; a hastily written thank you note pinned to the toe of a stocking in Burlington, Vermont; and everywhere on Christmas morning—toys—toys—toys.

There is also some proof that eight (and some say nine) tiny reindeer have been on the rooftops during the night of December 24th. Occasionally, you also hear mention of the help Santa has in getting his sled on the road. Elves, they say, and sometimes even a Mrs. Claus puttering and stitching in the corner.

Until now, that is about all that anyone has ever said about the rest of the Christmas team. Now there is startling new information available. You see, one Christmas morning we found an elf in the toe of our stocking.



He didn't seem at all disturbed when we uncovered him. He was quite round and his little green pants were barely able to contain him. After fumbling about in the jelly beans, he uncovered his tall green hat and with a wide sweeping gesture, he gave us a bow which caused his face to turn very red. He informed us his name was Willie and that his brother Silly had accidentally popped him into a stocking while he was adjusting his shoe lace.



"Actually, I don't usually work in packing," said Willie. "I do tree decorations and nativity scenes, but in the last minute scramble we all have to pitch in where we are needed. Silly of Silly to stuff me up, but then that's why we call him that—Silly, I mean."

We invited Willie to help us open our stockings, but he said he would just watch, and settled down with Sam the cat, on the hearth. I never knew until then that cats



like elves. Willie said that elves know secret humming songs they enjoy. Sometimes when you see your cat looking particularly content, it is because there is a lesser elf perched just inside his ear humming. If you stroke your cat on the head, he will shake you off because he wants to hear the end of the hum.

After stocking time, we gathered to have breakfast before going in to see the big tree with its presents tucked under the branches. Willie joined us and perched on a salt shaker to enjoy a cup of milk.

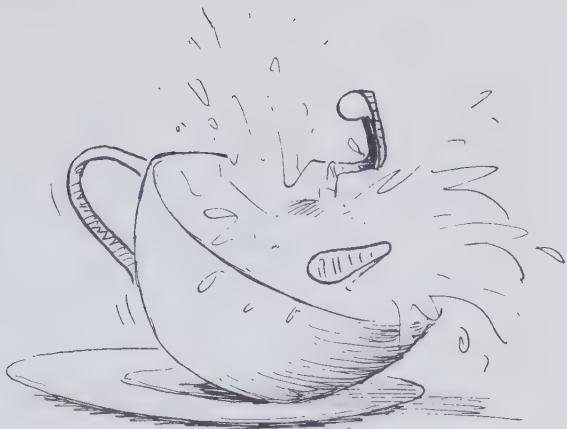
"I really should be thinking about getting back to the factory," he announced between sips.

"Factory," said our youngest son, "what kind of factory? I thought elves lived in the woods and sat under mushrooms."



"Wood's elves," sniffed Willie stretching far over the lip of his cup to get the rest of the milk. "They do that sort of thing—keeping up with buttercup planting and dandelion seed spreading. The tomten elves work on farms, watching the cows and seeing that the chickens are safe. But we are house elves and we work in the Christmas Factory."





"Do tell," said our oldest.

"Delighted to," replied Willie. But just then his tall hat fell off into the milk and he had to scramble to recover it. In the process, he slid into the cup and went under. He came up bubbling and spluttering.

"No bother," he chirped, "Half-elves are drip dry." He emptied his hat and after adjusting it on his head, he paddled over to the lip of the cup and clambered out. Then he did a little elf jig and was dry before we could blink.

"I think you are rather small to make toys," said our youngest. "You hardly come up to the tea cup rim, so how can you make a bicycle or a giant panda bear?"

"By snooking, of course," said Willie. "We all snook up or down to fit the need."





"What's snooking?" we all chimed in.

"It's a little half-elf magic we Elflings do. What you do is put your thumb in your mouth and if you want to get bigger you blow."

And with that Willie gave a big puff on his thumb. Before we could draw back, he swelled up until he was pushing all the walls of the breakfast room and us at the same time.



“A bit of
misjudgment in
the size of
the snook and
the room
involved,”
muttered Willie
as his giant
green stomach
pinned us to
the wall between
the bird prints
and the clock.

“However,
snooking down
is just as easy,
and will give
us a bit more
room.”

With that, he
sucked in on
his thumb and
immediately
shrank to the
size of a small
ping pong ball.



"Too far, too far," he muttered. "Just the right snook is so hard to adjust sometimes."

He gave a little puff on the end of his thumb and swelled up to the right size—about as large as a fresh English muffin.

"Good," he smiled, "my favorite proportion. Just big enough to enjoy a good tidbit and not feel stuffed. Well, there you are. Now you know what an Elfling can do—or at least some of his tricks. You see we are not common elves. They are a shadowy lot. Hard to focus on, especially in the moonlight. Comes from living on stump water and thistles. Try and hold a decent conversation with one and like as not he will fade out on you. I walk through several of them every time I go in the woods. They think it's funny, but I call it bad manners. No sir, we Elflings are half-elves and proud of it. We eat good solid bread crumbs and table scraps and you can poke us in the stomach and we yell."

"I never heard of a half-elf," said our oldest. "What's the other half?"

"What you see," said Willie.

"I see a small fat man who says he works for Santa Claus," said our oldest, "but I want to know more."

"More is the rest of the story," smiled Willie. "Or rather the beginning of it—or how it began—or as some Grandmothers like to say, 'Once upon a time in the long, long ago'—but never mind, this is how it happened.





You see Elflings are the kind of half-elves who slip in after hours and do little chores the family can't get done during the day. When we first met Mr. Claus, he lived in a little village in the mountains of what they called Bavaria. Mr. Claus was a wood carver and he made beautiful figures for churches as well as wooden bowls and mugs.



Every year as the nights got longer and the snow piled higher around his shop he would begin to make little things for the children of the village. Now, understand this was a no nonsense farm village where everyone had to work hard. There was no time for anyone to think of making playthings for children. Mr. Claus thought it would be a treat for them to get something just for fun on Christmas morning.

Every year he would make a gift for each child and on the eve of Christmas he would put on his big red coat and crunch through the snow to leave a little toy on each doorstep. When he had finished his rounds, he would go home to his stove and Mrs. Claus would bring him a hot mug of cocoa to warm his middle while the stove warmed his toes.





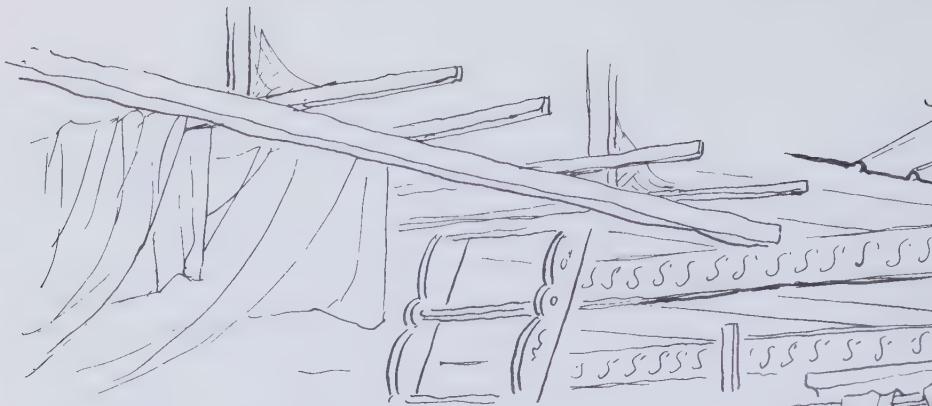
Mr. Claus' secret gifts were so successful that all of the children came to depend on him bringing them each year. They even began putting out a shoe for each child in the family in case he didn't remember how many were living in the house.

Soon Mr. Claus found he had to spend part of the fall and even the summer working on toys. His bowl and mug business got backed up and finally people started going to other villages to get them made.

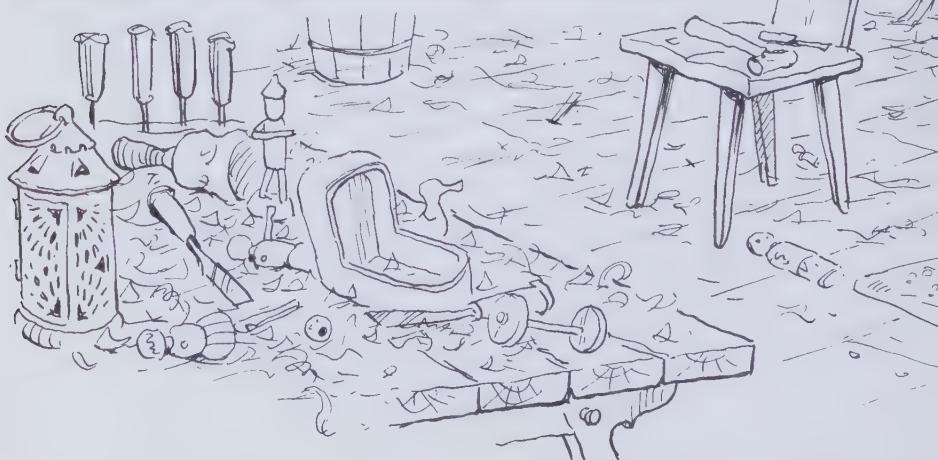
At the same time, families with large numbers of children began to move into the area, as the stories of the wonderful Christmas Eve gifts spread throughout Bavaria. Mr. Claus did his best to keep up, until soon he was working the springtime too, whittling and sanding and painting far into the night.

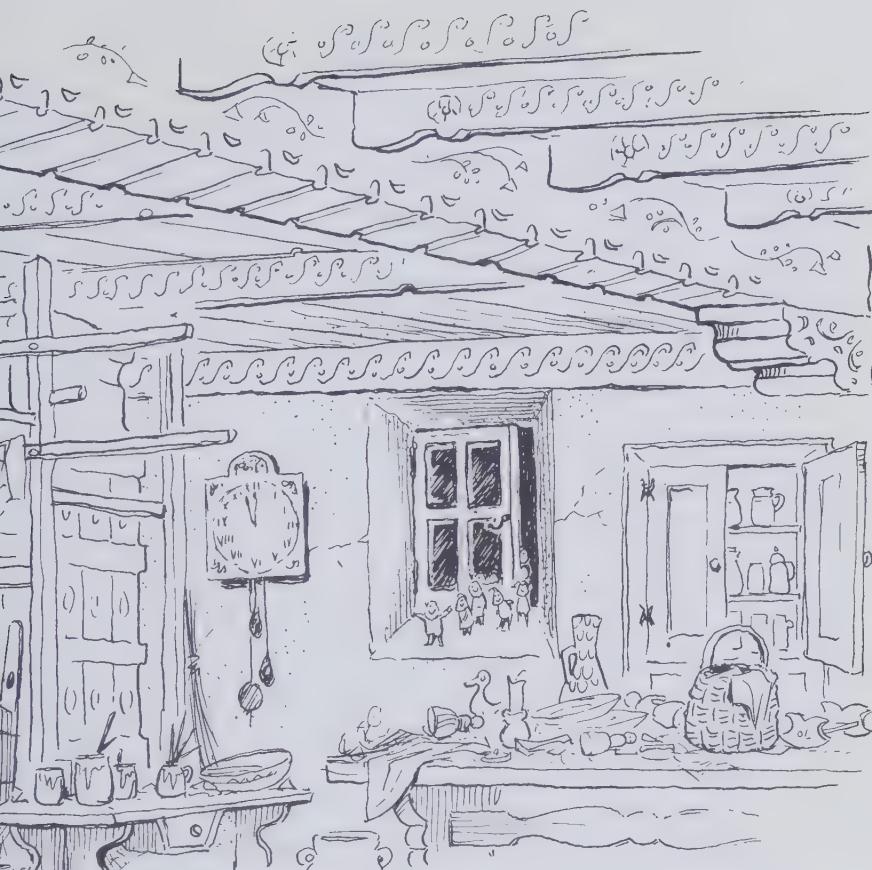
Mrs. Claus kept him going with lots of sausage and hot potato salad on the table. Then in her spare time, she began to work too. She trimmed the wooden dolls with bits of cloth and painted eyes on the faces.





Every evening the Clauses would go to bed with lots of bits and pieces of work not finished. Now, you may have heard about our cousins who once helped out a shoemaker—they were half-elves too. Well, in much the same way our Papa Elfling happened on the house of Mr. Claus. Papa was leading our family from the village of Huffdorf to Muddleburg because he had heard of a rope-maker who couldn't keep up with his orders. Night had fallen and Papa and Mama Elfling were looking for a cracked window or door to slip through for the night. Elflings like to sleep under a cupboard near the warm kitchen stove as the fire is dying down. They also like bits of table scraps or a cat's bowl of milk handy for dinner. That is why we began humming cat hums, to get them to share their drink with us on winter evenings.





That night Mr. Claus had left his window open a tiny crack to cool his soup at dinner. Tilly Elfling spied it and the whole family quickly squeezed through into the work shop kitchen. What a confusion of half made toys and cups and bowls and dirty dishes we found. It made our little half-elf hearts jump with joy. We quite forgot our hunger as everyone set about some chore.

The sawdust flew and the paint splashed far into the morning hours. At 'rooster time' we were just finished and barely had time for a bit of food and a scramble under the cupboard to bed when the Claus family appeared.



As usual when a half-elf has been busy, the couple was amazed to see how much had been done.

"Hah," smiled Mr. Claus, who understood elf lore, "we have half-elves in the house." He seemed very happy about all of this and went to work on some new toys right after his breakfast of hard roll and jelly. He also told Mrs. Claus to be sure to get more milk from the neighbor's cow and start being a bit more careless about table scraps falling on the floor.

That night we whittled and painted everything that was not finished, so that by morning there was another pile of toys ready to store in the corner. As the days went by, the little house began to get rather crowded. It was





only mid-August and there were toys up to the window ledge. Mr. Claus began to be concerned about over-production. He tried starting less each day and quitting around tea time to sit in front of his house and practice going "ho-ho-ho," which was a thing he thought he should be saying as he squished through the wet snow on Christmas Eve. He had tried saying "he-he-he" but Mrs. Claus said it made him look silly.



Even working half a day, Mr. Claus soon found that his toys had spilled into the hall and were fast creeping toward the stairs to the sleeping loft. By October, Mr. Claus had to rent a neighbor's barn. Every morning, he and Mrs. Claus would wrap the new toys in bed sheets and slip them over into the horse stalls and milking parlor, and finally up into the hay loft. The old barn began to sag so that the owner threatened to take it back before the Clauses ruined it.







We Elflings were happy as sunshine. Working always makes a half-elf dance and sing. We did. Every night, as we finished our work and the morning grey was peeking over the fence, everyone in the family would join hands and dance around the toys we had just finished that night. We know a lot of special little songs that put joy and fun into toys when they are done. You have to do that—otherwise a toy is just a thing. After a couple of songs you can see the toys glow with anticipation. Then Silly, the youngest in our family, would lift each toy and give it a kiss. That put love in the toy, so that it could respond to the child who received it. With love and joy inside, even a wooden doll can be something special.







Then it was off to bed under the pantry cupboard. Mama and Papa—Aunt Lilly—and Gilly and Zilly—and Tilly—and Silly. Last of all would be Speedy who always comes in a bit slow. Of course I was there too—right between Tilly and Zilly. We Elflings always sleep in a circle with our big toes touching. That keeps the family together, and you can never be lonesome when there are eighteen warm toes to rub against.



When Christmas came that year, Mr. Claus tried to load the gifts into his old sack, but they spilled out on the floor. Not even a fraction of them would get in. He tried to walk, but the weight made him wobble and stagger around the barn. He kept bumping into posts and scattering toys all over the straw floor. He couldn't even manage one "ho" in his "ho-ho-ho." Finally, he fell in the corner and toys went everywhere. Mrs. Claus scurried around gathering up the lovely dolls and carts and animals to stuff back in the sack.

In desperation, Mr. Claus went to the neighbor's other barn and hitched up a team of four plow horses to a broken swaybacked wagon. Snow was falling fast and night was getting on. We Elflings kept our place under the horse trough and watched as the Clauses loaded the wagon with hundreds of bright gifts. We would have helped, but in those days half-elves only did left over work after the family went to bed.





Anyway, somehow that Christmas Eve, Mr. Claus got all of the gifts delivered to the doorsteps of the children of the village. Not just one toy per child as in years past, but two, three or more. There were even enough left for the older children and some of the grandparents who remembered the toys they had loved in years past.

What a wonderful morning that was. Children dashed about in the snow from house to house in the excitement of it all. Someone rang the bell in the village hall and mayor and fire watch rushed into the street to see where the emergency was. Dogs and cats chased each other among the people hurrying to spread the word of the wonderful gifts. A load of pigs got loose and crowded into the main street. Everywhere there was laughter and confusion. Everywhere, that is, except in the little shop of Mr. Claus.

There deep in the feather mattress, Mr. and Mrs. Claus lay sleeping, just as they had hit the bed. Downstairs we Elflings lay in our sleeping ring and rubbed toes in secret glee.



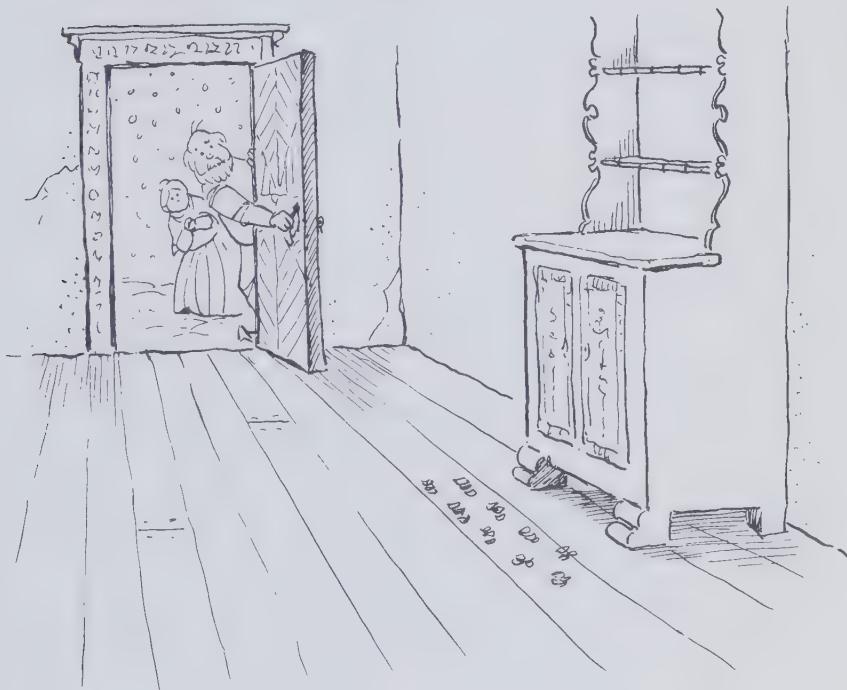


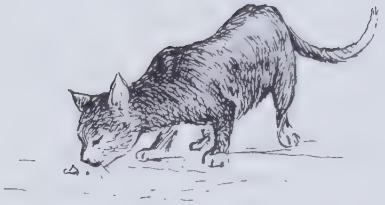
Now you would think that such success would make Mr. Claus very happy. But it did not. Instead he got into a secret whispering with Mrs. Claus over their potato soup that evening. The problem, as Mr. Claus saw it, was that if this system kept on he would be pushed out of his house by mid-April and by June both of his neighbors' barns would be sagged out of shape. He would have to get away from his half-elves.

That evening he pretended to go ask his neighbor how the plow horses were doing after working all night long in the snow. Actually, he was selling his little house to his neighbor's son who wanted to open a bake shop.

"Fine," thought Mr. Claus, "the half-elves can stay with the house and before summer, everyone in the village will be too fat to waddle from eating all of the cookies the little ones bake."

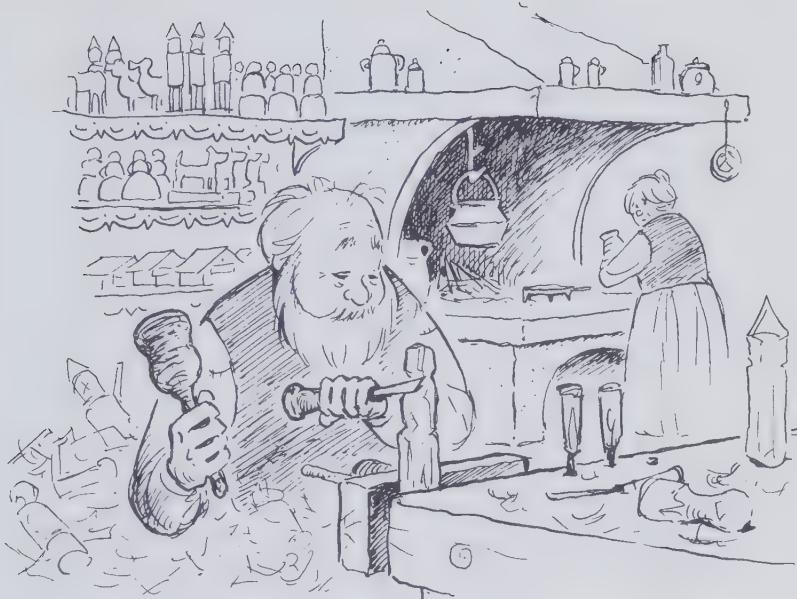
Early next morning the Clauses rolled up their feather bed and packed their furniture into a wagon. When it came time to load the cupboard Mrs. Claus whispered, "Not that piece. The you-know-who sleep under it, and if we leave things as they are they won't know we are gone until darkness. By then, we can put two creeks and a river between us and all of that energy." So Mr. Claus left the cupboard sitting in the empty room. But Mrs. Claus, being a good old heart, could not bear to leave us without a meal. She laid out nine bits of bread, and nine bits of cheese, and nine bits of sausage—right where she thought we would come out.





Then off they scuttled and drove over the hill with everything they owned piled high in the wagon. Everything, that is, except the cupboard which sat cold and lonely in the kitchen. After a while something stirred under the cupboard. Then it sniffed and scratched. At last the fat old cat came crawling out and sniffed at the bits of food. In nine quick gulps, our evening meal was gone. But then, so were we. For riding high in the wagon, we Elflings were enjoying the sunset view of the second stream and first river on the way to our new home.





When Mr. Claus discovered we were still part of his family, he was somewhat upset. He had hoped to get back into the bowl business for at least five months of the year and only do a tiny toy for each village child at Christmas. But here we were, whittling and sanding and varnishing till sunup every night. Soon the second house looked more stuffed than the first.



Mr. Claus rented a hay barn, a wood shed, and two empty pig pens to store the mountain of gifts that soon began to pour out the door. Then he tried to find a team of horses, but there were none for hire. Finally, he arranged to borrow three oxen and an old donkey to pull a sled on Christmas Eve.

Again, he worked all of that wonderful night, with Mrs. Claus piling stacks of toys in the doorway so he would not have to pause too long to reload each trip. The donkey gave out on the tenth round and had to ride in the sled coming back.





Again there was hysterical excitement in the village on Christmas morning. Someone even began to make up a song about "The tired little man and three fat oxen and a donkey," but it didn't seem to hum too well, and no one could think of anything Christmasy to rhyme with donkey.

Mr. Claus did not hear all of the singing and happiness. He was buried too deep in his feather bed, snoring so loudly that it rattled the tea cups in the kitchen where we Elflings were also resting and rubbing toes.



When he finally roused himself the morning after Christmas, Mr. Claus took Mrs. Claus outside and they sat on a bench under a larch tree where he felt sure we could not hear his plans.

Two days later, Mr. Claus cut off his beard, dyed his hair red and put on a strange outfit. Mrs. Claus also tried to change her looks and when the coach came through on the way to Puddledorf, they ran and jumped aboard.

They left all of their household furniture, clothes, and personal treasures. The only thing Mr. Claus could not bear to leave behind was his wooden chest of fine tools for carving.





When the coach had cleared the village by several miles, Mr. Claus breathed a sigh of relief. So did we Elflings—because it had been very hard for all of us to get inside the tool box even snooked down to our smallest. Aunt Lilly had a particularly bad time fitting between the chisels and Zilly kept fighting not to sneeze from the dust. Speedy almost didn't make it when his scarf got caught in a crack. But there we were at last, rolling off to Puddledorf.



We spent two happy years in that village. By the second Christmas, the name of Puddledorf was known throughout the country as the place of the wonderful gifts. Distant relatives of all the people who lived there made a point of coming to spend the holiday season in Puddledorf so that their shoes could be put out to get the beautiful toys on Christmas morning.

It was on New Year's Eve of that year that Mr. Claus came to a decision. He sat at the table in the kitchen while Mrs. Claus served his favorite pudding. They were both wearing party hats to celebrate the coming year, but Mr. Claus was very deep in thought. He could hardly eat a thing he was so busy thinking. Finally, after a fourth bowl of pudding, he pushed his party hat back on his head and looked right at Mrs. Claus.

"Mama," he said, "I'm not getting any younger—in fact, every year I feel like I'm getting older. The truth is I can't keep on moving around trying to get away from those half-elves and I can't make a living carving wooden bowls when I don't have time to carve them. To tell the truth, I enjoy seeing the wonderful things they make out of my little whittlings. I think we might as well give up and make friends with them."

Mrs. Claus smiled a motherly smile and said, "I always knew a man with such fat little cheeks and a big round belly had to have a kind heart. I had already decided we should adopt the elves. In fact, I made them each a new outfit as a New Year's present. I have been peeking down at them for several months while they worked and their clothes are very old and patched. I even made them little gum shoes to go over those big toes they have."

She hurried to the loft and brought back nine little costumes with nine pair of little gum shoes and laid them out on the table beside Mr. Claus' pudding bowl.

Mr. Claus was so proud of what she had done he gave her a hug and ate another bowl of pudding before he found the words to say anything. Then they put the little clothes on the floor by the new cupboard beneath which we lived.



"Come out little elves," sang Mr. Claus. "We want to be friends. See we have gifts for you."

Now it is a standing rule with half-elves that when anyone gives them something in return for their work—not including food, of course—that we are supposed to pack up and move on. I never understood why—but that is the rule.

"What are we to do," said Gilly, looking at the new clothes.

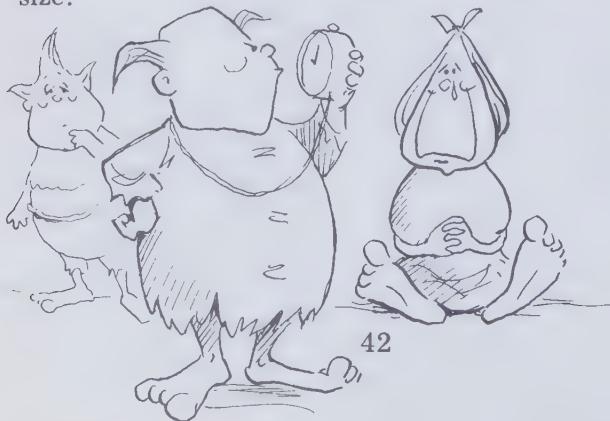


"You know the rules," said Papa sternly looking at his watch. "It's time to pack up."

"But I like it here," exclaimed Zilly.

"Me too," echoed Tilly and Silly.

"And . . . uh . . . me too, I guess," said Speedy slowly. His eyes were on a pair of gum shoes that looked just his size.





"A rule is a rule," said Papa banging his watch on the floor to see if it was losing time.

"But what about the children?" said Mama.

"They all have to go too," ordered Papa. "Every single Elfling right down to the smallest and the slowest."

"Not OUR children," exclaimed Mama. "The village children love to get the toys. It makes them feel loved, and the love spreads to everyone who shares it."

"That's because of the magic songs, of course," said Papa. "We all know that."

"And the kisses of love," reminded Silly. "Don't forget my special kiss."





"Yes, yes," spluttered Papa, "the kiss too. But rules are rules and elf rules are even more so. Gather your things. We are off to another home."

"But we have no things to gather," cried Silly. "All we could gather is out there on the floor waiting for us."

"No one ever said elf-life was a bed of feathers," said Papa sternly. "We have each other. If you want to take something with you, find a walnut or roll up some of the dust balls under this cupboard. Bother. Who ever heard of an elf with an armload of luggage."

With that Papa marched off through a crack in the wall, and—ready or not—everyone had to follow him out into the night.



When morning came, the Clauses were surprised to find that their gifts had been left untouched. Then when Mrs. Claus squatted down and peeked under the cupboard, she gave a squeak of dismay and fell over.

"They're gone," she gasped, "the elves are gone."

They looked everywhere for us—in boxes, drawers, and laundry. We were far away by then making elf tracks—which always look like one elf, no matter how many there are in a group.





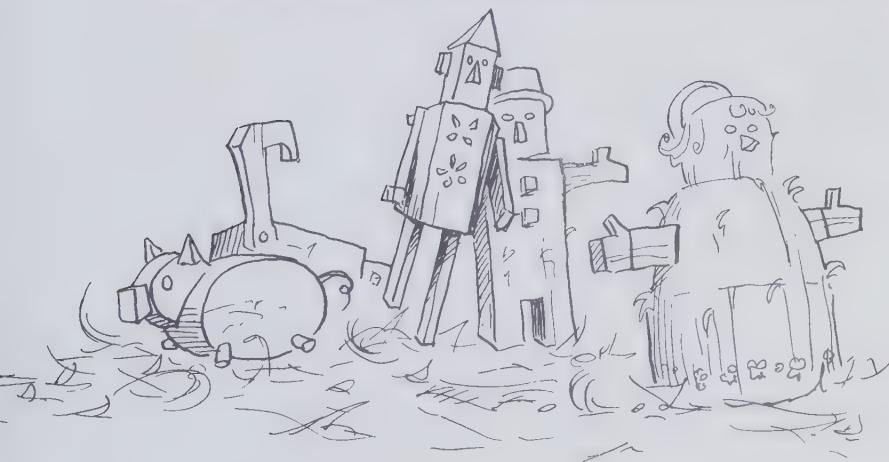
The Clauses were filled with sadness, but they tried to keep up their spirits with work. After all, Christmas was only eleven months away. Mr. Claus set about carving and painting and sanding all day long, but, of course, he couldn't make anywhere near the number of toys by himself. And they were not beautiful warm toys that glowed with love and joy. They were rather dull and lopsided. Some didn't stand at all, but rolled sadly over and lay on their faces in the sawdust. The wooden animals were al-

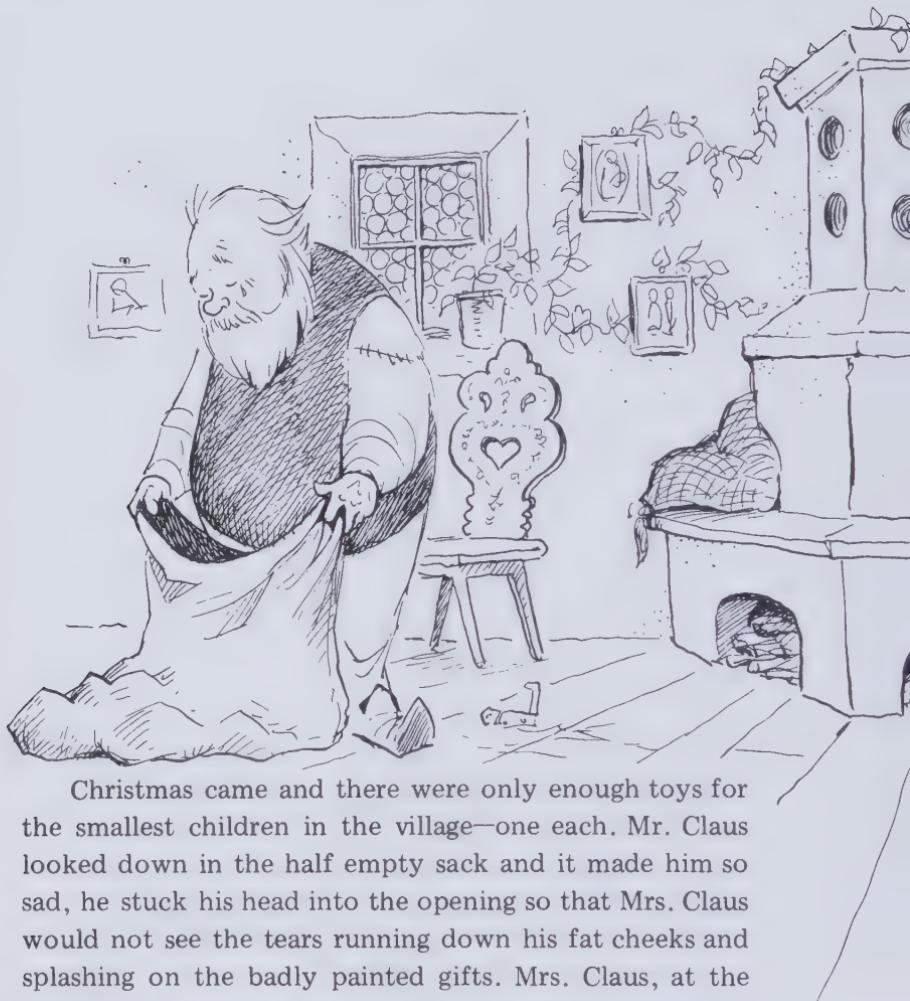




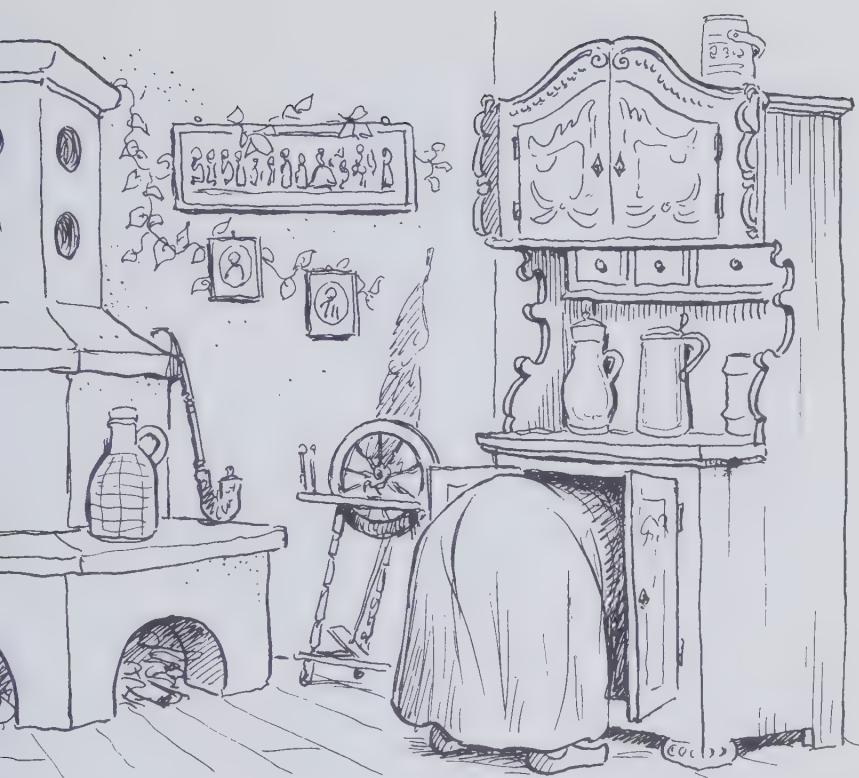
ways wibble-wobble, because at least one of their legs was too short. When Mr. Claus tried to fix them, the legs got shorter and shorter until the horses looked like they had pig's legs and the pigs didn't have any legs at all.

Mrs. Claus tried to make the toys lovable by hugging them and reading nice stories to them. She even put them out in the sunshine to make them glow. But they only warped and cracked, and the paint peeled away in spots.



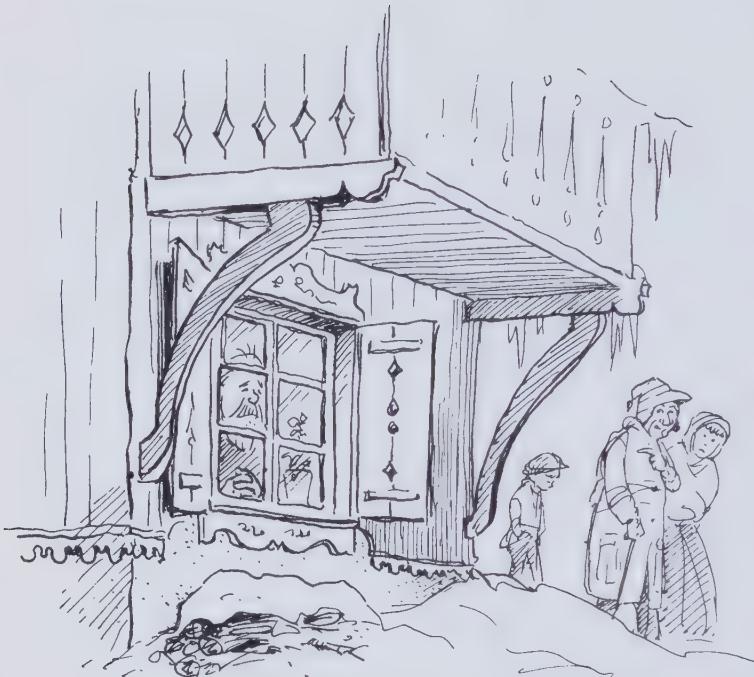


Christmas came and there were only enough toys for the smallest children in the village—one each. Mr. Claus looked down in the half empty sack and it made him so sad, he stuck his head into the opening so that Mrs. Claus would not see the tears running down his fat cheeks and splashing on the badly painted gifts. Mrs. Claus, at the same time, had her head in the cupboard looking for



something far back on the shelf, so Mr. Claus would not see her tears.

One short walk around the village was all it took and Mr. Claus was home by seven thirty. He was sitting silently at the kitchen table with a big bowl of pudding topped by his favorite raisins and nuts uneaten before him.



Christmas morning was not as bouncy in Puddledorf as it had been. The children who did not get gifts were sad because they thought they had done something wrong. The children who received toys were sad because the toys were so sad. The parents and elders of the village shook their heads and said, "Never mind, Mr. Claus is getting old—he has lost his touch—pity."

That did not make Mr. Claus one bit happier.

"They're right," he said to Mrs. Claus sadly. "I told you just last year I was getting older. Too old to make good toys. Maybe too old to make good bowls. Certainly too old to stay in Puddledorf and hear everyone tell me how old I am getting."

Mrs. Claus didn't say so, but she was feeling a little more grey herself.

At sunup, the Clauses locked their door and carrying only a few clothes and his beloved tool box they slipped off once more into the trees. Only this time there were no elves to ride with them, and no children to regret their leaving. Only a fox watched them pass, and he paid little attention to them.



That was a bad winter. Some say it was the worst since the last bad winter anyone could remember. The snow lay on the snow until it was hard to tell a house—from a tree—from a windmill. The old people sat closer to the fire and told stories of the wind that swallowed up anyone who got in its way, and other such frightening tales that made the children rush off to bed early and bundle tightly together under the feather comforters.





The snow rose to the edge of the roofs and the wind whistled through every crack it could find. The candle light flickered so badly that even the mothers and fathers became nervous and turned in early. All night long the great sad wind wailed and twisted around the corners of the buildings and fence rows.





Morning was grey, midday was grey, and evening was not at all. After a while, everyone forgot the Claus family. It was as if the winter darkness had swallowed them up. Which indeed it had.





But the Clauses were not all that the winter wind had found wandering about. For twelve months the Elfling family had been pretty elf-loose and fancy free. We had wandered from dorf to dorf looking for a new location to set up good deeds. We had tried a seamstress who found our creations so original, she had moved to another town and made a fortune. A potter we helped had begun to



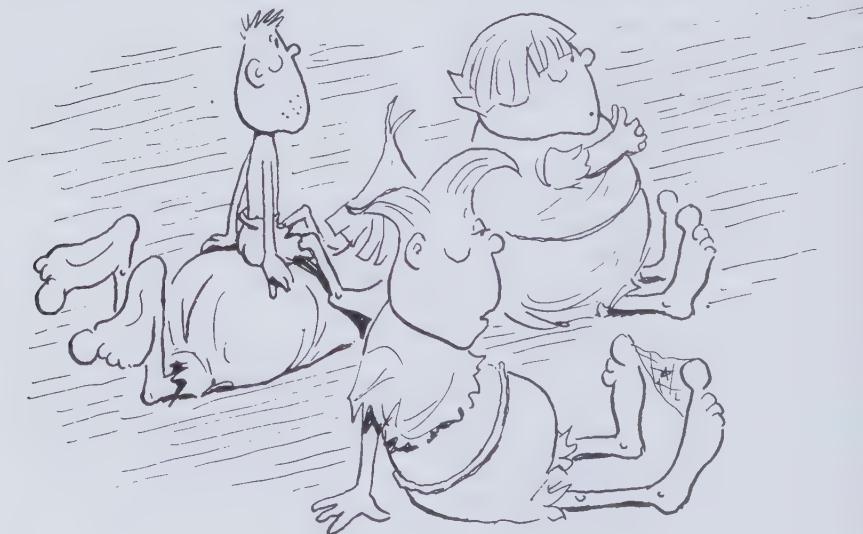


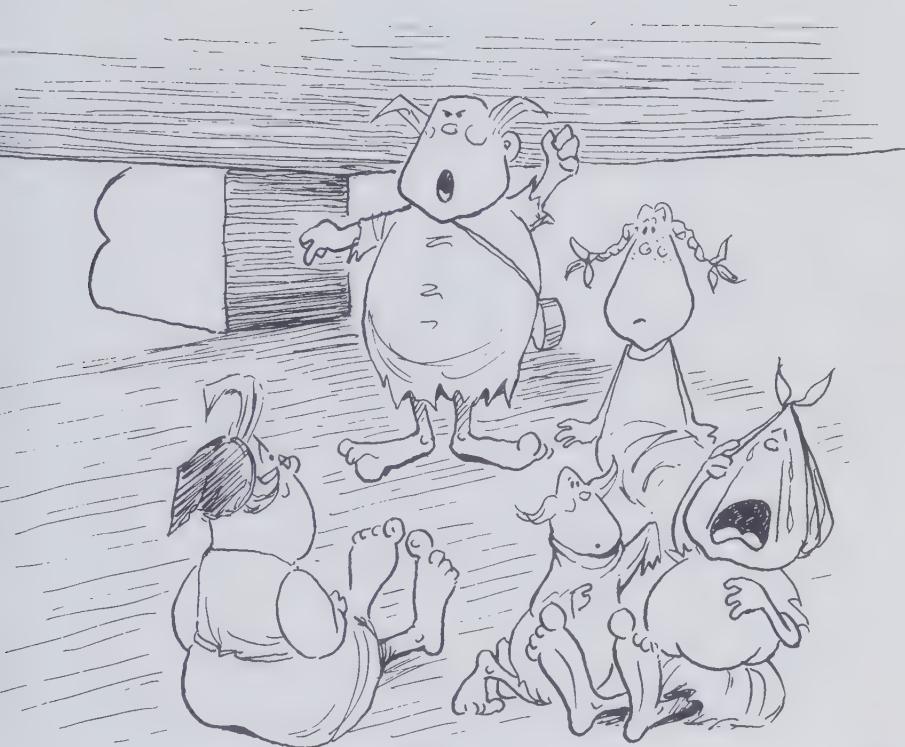
mass produce our designs even faster than half-elves could do them, and he too had become rich. A shoemaker became the personal cobbler of a rich king because of our clever gum shoes—which we had copied from the ones we had seen Mrs. Claus make for us. He only had to make three pair a year to satisfy the king—one in gold—one in ermine—and one in gum for running in the castle park.



Each time we Elflings found that the people we helped turned the goodness to profit and didn't need us. Only the Claus family understood the pure love of giving, and the giving had made the toys special.

Finally, one evening when we were sitting under the cupboard of a tailor who had just taken our design and fitted it to the richest banker in town, Papa said: "Elflings, I think we have been had. We have worked for the joy and love of giving and because of this our creations have been good. But in most cases our love has been turned around, and not only are we out of work, but the magic is gone. How many coats have we danced around . . . how many pots have we kissed . . . let's face it, not everyone has the gift of turning pure goodness into more goodness. Sometimes I wish we were just wood elves and could spend our time growing lucky mushrooms and cultivating wild flowers."





Everyone nodded in agreement. Aunt Lilly even began to cry. She was very good at this since she had never found a husband elf. The sound of her wet tears splashing on the dusty floor helped to make everyone that much sadder. Silly tried to wipe them up with his sleeve and pat them back on Lilly's face, but it only made her smudgy. Speedy tried to hurry up and say something cheerful but his mind wandered off watching a spider spin its web between his feet.

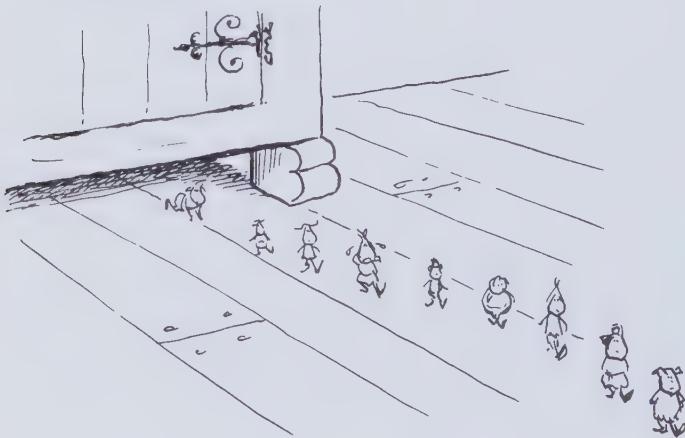


After a long emptiness of silence, Papa Elfling took out his great watch and looked at it fretfully.

"Look at the time," he fussed. "What a waste."

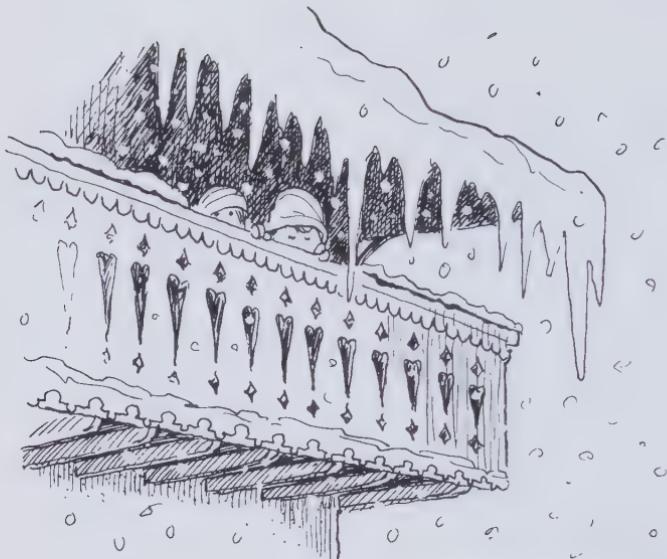
"Never mind," said Mama patting Papa on the watch. "We still have time to pack and walk off into the snow before morning."

Which we did.





This time, however, we didn't just look for the next needy worker in the village. We turned our toes toward the edge of town and kept them pointed right over the bridge and up the hill and out of sight into the swirling snow that hid the near mountains. That was the end of the magic in that village.



Winter stretched on in cold grey whiteness. Old men measured the depth of the snow on the outside walls beside the woodpiles and noted that not since they had been little had the measure marks been so high. Still the snow fell. As the view out the windows got smaller, so did the woodpiles. Old Grandmothers talked about the





year the snow lasted until July and they had only turnips to eat the next winter. The children sat by the fire and played with their toys of Christmas past and felt a great emptiness which was something between not having an afternoon snack and losing a favorite pet. If anyone wondered about what had happened to the Claus family they didn't say so. One can only suppose that like so much kindness, it was forgotten in the presence of current discomfort. And still it snowed.

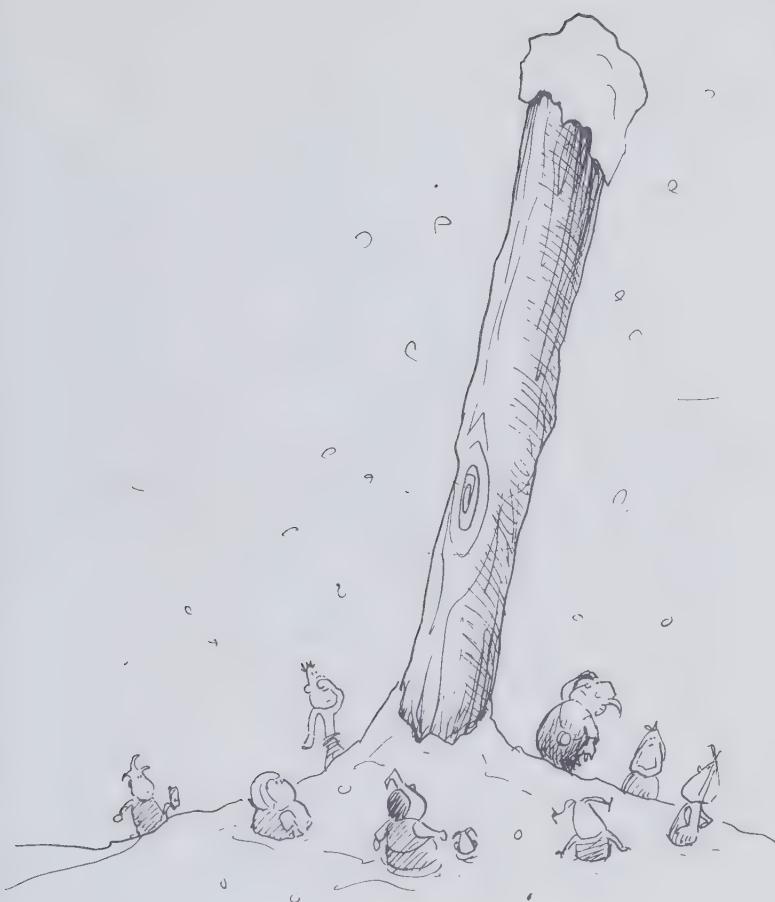




The Elfling family didn't seem to feel the cold as we struggled over the great drifts and down into the dark hollows formed by the driving wind. Every little while when the ice began to form on our ears or fingers, we would make a circle and holding hands we would sing a little family togetherness song. As we did, the warmth of love passed from frozen finger to frozen finger and everything melted away with the glow we shared. Then we would turn our toes north again and keep plodding.



For a long time, we had seen nothing and no one. A bear had met us several weeks back and we spent that night under his fur singing our songs until his tummy was quite a warm red. He thanked us the next day and headed south to find a fishing hole. Besides this encounter there had been nothing. Then suddenly one noontime, Zilly ran into something hard.



"Ho," he called, "I've hit something."

Everyone gathered around and peered through the greyness to see what it was.

"It's a pole in the ground," announced Gilly, "A great big pole."

"Pull it out," instructed Papa.

We all tried, but the pole was stuck fast.



"Climb up it," suggested Mama.

We made an elfman ladder and Silly climbed up to the top and looked at what he found.

"It's flat," he called down, "and there's something cut into the wood."

"Ha," exclaimed Papa, "let me come up and read it."



After some rearranging of the ladder, he climbed up. There was a long silence as Papa studied the message.

"Well? Well?" fussed Mama, who had no patience with waiting around for educational things. "What does it say?"

"It says," announced Papa with great dignity, "if I am reading it correctly—and not upside down—which is entirely possible since I can only get at one side of this pole—it says—freely translated and not adding any frills—"

"Oh, do get on with it," exclaimed Mama, who was getting tired of Speedy standing on her head, "What does it say exactly?"



"It says N."

"N," spluttered Mama, "N what."

"N nothing," said Papa, "just N. N as in Nothing—
N as in Nevermind what it means, it just says N."

"Well, come down and let me rest my head,"
called Mama, "that is the silliest sign I ever heard."

When our family had all gathered at the base of the pole, we sat down to rub our heads and discuss the strange object. Papa put his mind to the puzzle and everyone stopped thinking until he was finished. He sat for a long time looking at his clock, which had frozen at two-thirty,



and occasionally winding it. Finally, he put on the wisest of wise looks. Everyone knew he had solved the problem.

"N," he said with great dignity, "stands for NOWHERE—which is the name of this bit of ice and snow we are visiting."

"How very simple," exclaimed Gilly, "Any elf should know that."

"How wise of you, Papa," sighed Mama, which caused Papa to blush in spite of his stern face.



"I'm cold," muttered Silly, "It's cold in NOWHERE. I wish we were in a warm SOMEWHERE—like near the toymaker's stove."

"Me too," chattered Tilly, wrapping her curls around her for warmth, "I miss the comforts of a dusty corner."

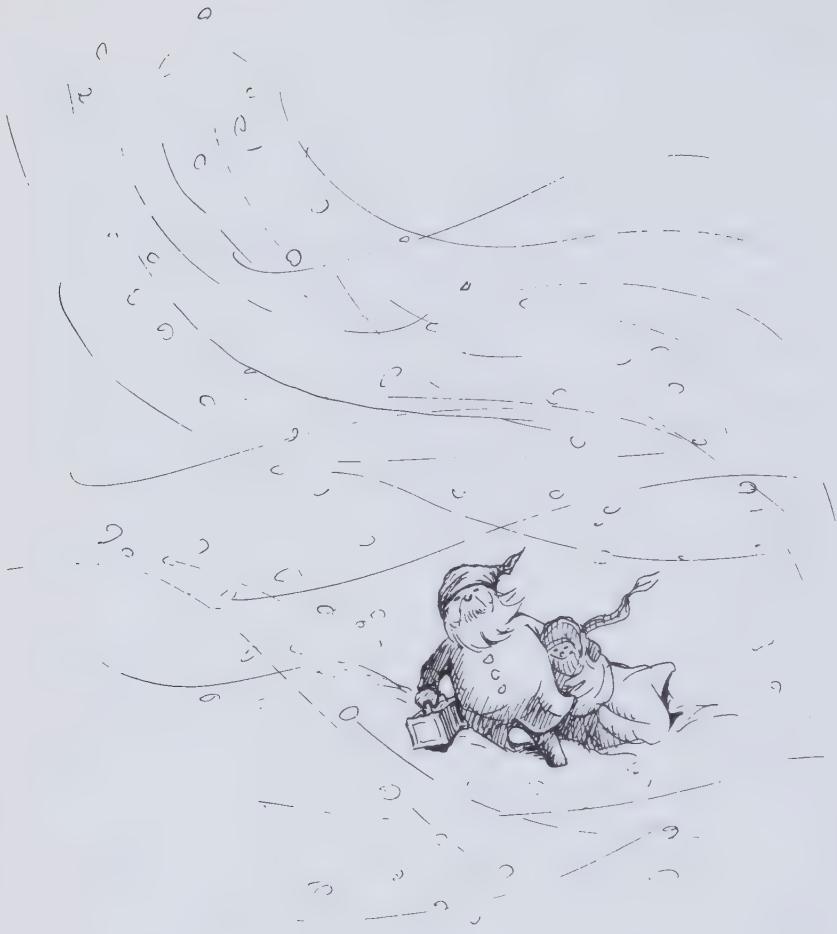
"Time for a little elf magic," smiled Papa taking Mama's hand and Aunt Lilly's hand. Everyone smiled and joined in making our circle around the N Pole. Then bouncing and bobbing around, we sang the togetherness song and suddenly each of us began to glow rosy red. As





we danced the heat caused us to sink deeper into the snow until we were quite out of sight. Then we sat down, warm and comfortable, near the base of the pole and still holding hands and humming our song we fell into a deep sleep with all of our great toes touching the pole.

In a little while the snow, which had never stopped falling, filled the hole and left the surface just as it had been.



About this time out of the swirl of flakes and rolling whiteness came two lonely figures. Of course it had to be the Claus family because no one else would have ventured out in such weather.

They moved slowly, leaning into the wind and occasionally letting it roll them this way and that. They had become so confused that they left a trail of little circles and big circles in the storm. All at once, Mr. Claus ran into something.



"I bumped my nose," he howled, "It's so cold, I think I broke it."

"Let me see," said Mrs. Claus feeling about.

Then she exclaimed "You certainly did."

"You mean it's broken," wailed Mr. Claus.

"No, I mean you DID bump into something. Here it is. A pole of some sort I gather."

Mrs. Claus was patting and rubbing the pole to decide what it was doing out there.

"Why there's something written on the top," she announced. "It's the letter N. Fancy that. What can it stand for?"

Mr. Claus forgot all about his nose and shouted. "It's the North Pole. We found the North Pole—we walked all the way from Puddledorf without knowing it and discovered the North Pole."

"No wonder I'm so tired," sighed Mrs. Claus, "Do you suppose we could burn it and get warm?"

"Poor Mother Claus," said Mr. Claus wrapping his arms around her. "Even if we could light it the pole wouldn't burn long. And everyone would be so angry with us for destroying a landmark. Come sit down and we'll try and bundle up against the wind."

They sat down together with their backs against the North Pole and held each other tightly. Mr. Claus peered out into the endless whiteness.

"I miss our home," he said. "I miss Puddledorf and the toy shop."

"And the elves," added Mother Claus.

"Ah, yes," said Mr. Claus, "Especially the elves and their wonderful gifts."



As they sat there trying to warm each other with memories, a wonderful thing began to happen. Their toes began to tingle, and their ears began to glow. Instead of feeling tired, they began to feel so full of wonderful joy inside that they forgot every ache and pain they had ever known. Instead of sighing, they wanted to sing.

You see, what had happened was the elf magic had gotten into the N pole and spread up to the Claus family so that they were full of elf magic too. And once elf magic gets into your system it never goes away.

Just then a voice from down in the snow yelled: “Someone is sitting on my head.”







It was Speedy and in a moment he came burrowing out of the drift and popped into sight. A moment later eight other heads popped up. There we all were staring at each other in surprise. In another moment, we forgot all of the things that elves and humans are not supposed to do when they meet. We just began to hug and kiss and jump about telling each other how glad we were to be together.



Suddenly, Mrs. Claus looked down at our feet.

"Why you poor little things," she exclaimed. "You're still in your ragged clothes with your big bare toes out in the snow."

With that she dug down into her apron pocket and pulled out all of the bright beautiful clothes she had made for us so long ago. She even had the eighteen little gum shoes for our feet.

"I kept them with me when everything else was gone," she said softly. "I always hoped we would get back together again."



"And so we have," announced Papa Elfling. "Tradition and elf laws or not, the Elfling family of half-elves is going to accept gifts from the host family of humans. The truth is, I can tell from the glow around you that some of our spirit has taken over your humanness—so probably you are more elf than human anyway. For another thing, you are the only people who have taken our acts of kindness and added more kindness to them. And the thirdmost thing is, that we like making toys more than anything else we do."

"Yes," we all shouted.

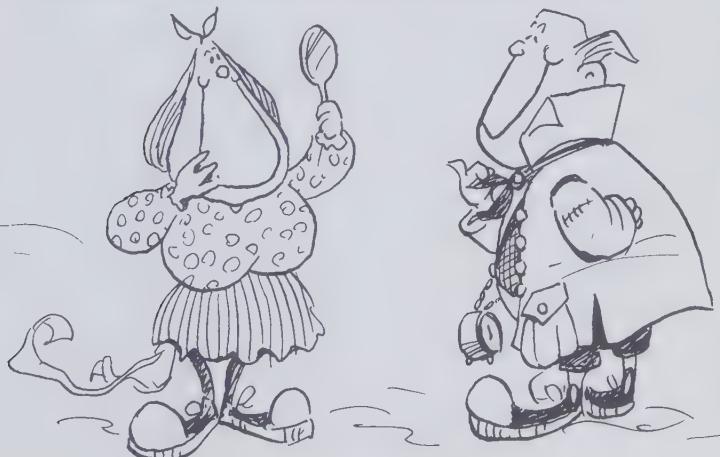
"Well then, do stop chattering and put on your gum shoes," exclaimed Mrs. Claus, "before you all catch a chill in your great toes."







Then quick as a cat, we all popped into the new clothes and began to dance around showing off our finery and talking at once about what we should do next.





The first thing we did was to build a little house right next to the N Pole. It started out small, but it soon grew in all directions because year after year there were so many more boys and girls in the world to make happy. Mr. and Mrs. Claus never grew any older, because as Papa Elfling had guessed they had soaked up so much of the elf magic and joy of doing for others that they were truly part elf too.





Every Christmas Eve Mr. Claus hitched up the team, which he finally decided should be eight or nine tiny reindeer. Reindeer, you see, seemed a good choice for someone living at the North Pole—and besides their antlers were a grand place to dry laundry.

Then no matter how many homes there were in the world, Mr. Claus found his way into every one where children believed in him. He didn't always leave gifts anymore. Sometimes he just softly hummed the family togetherness song, and for those who had ears to hear it, Christmas had even more meaning than before.



Being elfin, Mr. Claus now moved as fast as a moon-beam and seemed to be everywhere at once—without ever growing tired. Whenever anyone asked where his home was, Mr. Claus always said quickly that he lived at the North Pole, which may or may not be true. It is actually only a short walk from Puddledorf, where Mrs. Claus shops for milk and cheese and reindeer feed.







As for the great rambling house full of busy Elflings and beautiful toys—well, that is what we call the Christmas Factory. In the factory, each of us does a part of the work. Aunt Lilly and Tilly sew and tie ribbons. Gilly paints and hammers. Zilly tests the bulbs on the strings of Christmas lights. Speedy, being slow but adventurous, tries to make everything out of something called plastic. Some things look good, but don't last very long, and when we try to put love in them it slips off the sides. But he keeps trying.

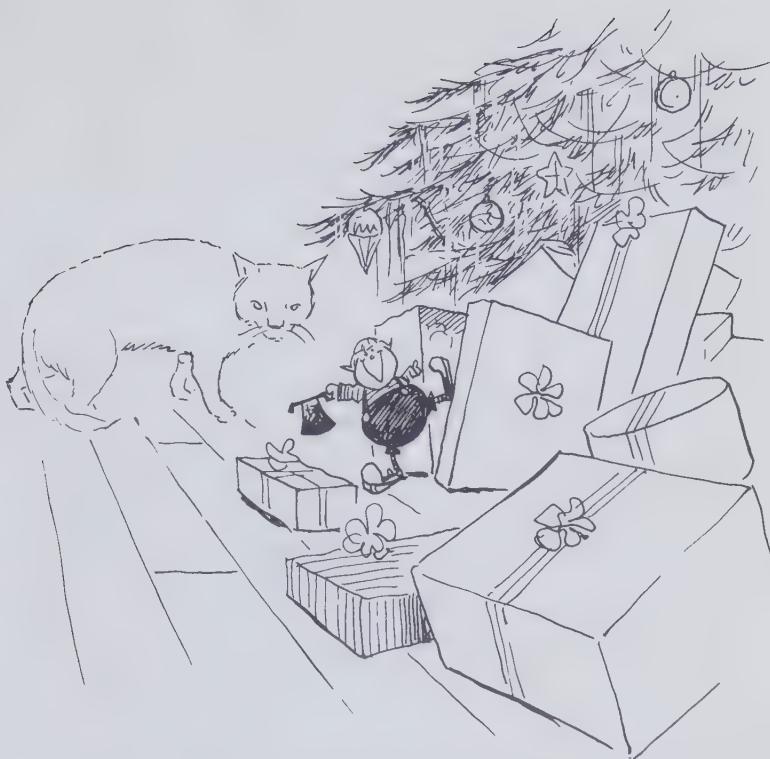
In the middle of all of our activity stands Papa Elfling checking his watch and muttering that time is flying and it is quarter till something or other.



But when the work is done on each toy the most important job still goes to Silly. He sits on a stool by the loading boxes that go to the big storerooms deep inside the house. Just before each toy is placed carefully in its box, Silly places a warm kiss on the top. And you know, you can still see the glow of love shining through the carton as they carry it into the storehouse.”

* * *





Just then Sam the cat nudged Willie Elfling from behind to make him sing another cat song.

"Ho," he exclaimed, "I've been chatting so long you haven't had time to open your gifts. I must be getting home too. Mama will be fretting and Mrs. Claus has promised us carrot cake for dinner. It's been lovely, but if you will excuse me"

With that, before we could ask another question, he gave a short bow, waved his large green hat and slipped beneath the wrapping of the nearest present under the tree.

Sam the cat padded up to the box and gave it a sniff.

“He can’t be gone,” said all of the children.

“Open the box,” said our youngest, “Who’s present is it?”

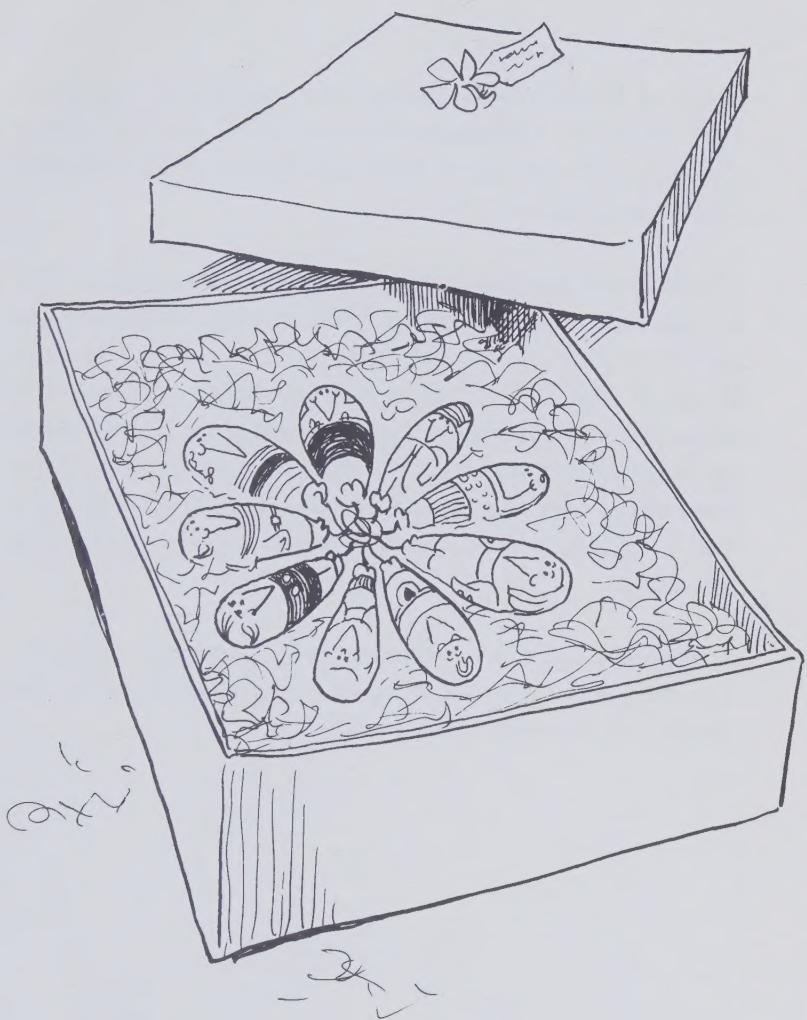
“I don’t remember seeing it before,” said the oldest.

“There’s no name on it,” said the youngest looking at the small green card tied to the ribbon, “It just says:

IN MEMORY OF HIS LOVE PLEASE HUM”

“We’ll open it together then,” said Mother softly.

As the wrapping fell away we carefully lifted the lid and suddenly there was a warm glow all around us. There in the box, nestled in a bed of straw, was a string of nine Christmas lights shaped like little figures. They were arranged in a circle with their toes touching and each seemed to be holding the next one by the hand. No one was the least bit surprised when Sam the cat nosed his way in and gently licked the one at the top who looked just like Willie Elfling.



Ken and Elizabeth Piotrowski are known for developing their fantastic Christmas Factory which has become a showcase of extravagant, animated figures and ornaments from around the world.

Togetherness was created by Ken and Elizabeth when they brought their first elf called Willy, the storyteller, to the Bavarian style resort of Helen, surrounded by the Blue Ridge Mountains. It was at this time they created nine other elves and developed each personality. The creation of *Togetherness* and their second book which they wrote soon after, titled *Marshmallow*, has given the Piotrowski's much joy and a desire to create new characters for the future.

Ken and Elizabeth have two sons, Kenny and Anthony. The boys have contributed many fun filled ideas for the characters throughout the years.

LOVE SILLY®

Silly, is the elf who loves the world.



Togetherness is the story of the elves in the Christmas Factory, created for children and adults.

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